

COLORADO BIRD NOTES

Bulletin of the Colorado Bird Club

Vol. 6 No. 3

Denver, Colorado

March 1959

RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY-DAY COLORADO NATURALISTS

by Catherine Hurlbutt

To talk with the oldest living professional naturalist in Colorado, Horace (Dad) Smith, is to go back to the beginnings of nature study in this state and relive the days of the pioneer naturalists, whose names are famous today through their writings and our modern scientific institutions of which they were the founders. Although the little cabin at what is now 29th and Lafayette Streets to which Father Smith brought his family in 1872 seemed at "Land's End" in its relation to the city of Denver, it was ideally situated for a lively youngster to gain a knowledge of the wide open spaces. Father Smith was an excellent farmer, raising 75 bushels of early Ross potatoes the first year, in spite of the fact that the neighbors' cattle frequently sampled his products. It is small wonder that at this point Horace recalls that the city maintained a "cow pound" from which owners could reclaim, for a dollar per head, their wandering stock which had been rounded up by the city's mounted policeman, Johnny Holland, employed by the city for that purpose. In spite of the hazards of pioneer farming, Mr. Smith turned out top quality products, winning prizes at the local fair with his Jocunda strawberries-- so large that 13 filled a quart measure--while the butter he marketed attracted no less a customer than the philanthropist George W. Clayton.

In these agricultural achievements young Horace and his brother, Ralph, took an active part. Fortunately for the cause of Colorado natural history, Mrs. Smith had a deep appreciation of nature and was keen to develop a similar interest in her sons. Accordingly, she wrote to the Agassiz Association in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, for membership for her sons. The boys were so enthusiastic over this new enterprise that they received permission from the Society to form a new chapter in Colorado, which became No. 413-C--(They never were able to locate the members of Chapters 413-A and B.)

Horace's interest in the out-of-doors was shared by a youthful neighbor, Alfred Webster Anthony, with whom Horace often went afield. Since Alfred was several years older than his companion, Horace was allowed to use a gun under his supervision, and, seeing his son came to no harm in his collecting activities, Father Smith bought him his first 12-gauge shotgun. Since the basis for natural history study in those days was a collection of specimens, it was under Mr. Anthony's guidance that Horace collected the first of the specimens which were later to become a part of the famous collection of the Colorado State Historical Society. As a young collector, Horace became a subscriber to the publication "Ornithologist and Oologist", put out by Frank Webster, who was a dealer in egg collections and other natural history specimens in the East. Horace contributed several articles to this publication, and a treasured volume in his library is a collection of these magazines dating from 1884 which he bound himself, following book-binding instructions published in an early issue of the Youth's Companion.

Alfred Anthony eventually took up his father's profession and became a mining engineer, but always retained his first interest in natural history, collecting the first specimen of the now-rare sea cow off the coast of southern California. His son also followed in his footsteps, and is the author of Anthony's Check List of Colorado Mammals.

Horace's brother, Ralph, ultimately became one of the early Postal Inspectors in the United States Post Office, and took part in solving many cases of mail theft, fraud, and more dangerous crimes. When a fellow inspector was murdered in a southern state, Ralph Smith obtained indisputable testimony of the guilt of certain suspects by hiding in a big drygoods box in a building where the gang was believed to have sympathizers, and where they gathered to discuss their next move. Fortunately, no one disturbed the big box and Mr. Smith was able to maintain the absolute silence necessary in his cramped quarters to avoid betraying his presence while he made notes on the conversation going on around him.

Nature, however, remained the absorbing interest in Horace's life, and he gravitated naturally into the company of those who shared this interest and who were the nucleus of the first natural history organizations in Colorado. The Colorado State Historical Society was organized in the late 70's by Dr. Bancroft, whom Mr. Smith recalls as a large man of distinguished bearing, 6 feet tall. Dr. Bancroft was a member of the State Legislature, and he sponsored a bill creating the State Historical Society and giving it official support. Professor Aaron Gove was a member of the newly formed society, and it was at his suggestion that natural history was included in its scope. Denverites are familiar today with the big building on East 14th Avenue, above the State Capitol Annex, and know it chiefly as an historical museum. Many people do not know, however, that it also at one time housed a natural history collection which has since been largely distributed among various state and city educational and public institutions.

The new organization first met in a room in the Chamber of Commerce Building, located around 14th and Lawrence Streets, which also housed the first Public Library. Mr. Ferrell was appointed as Curator of the Society, whose headquarters were later moved to the Capitol Building. It was here that Horace Smith came often to examine specimens and exchange information of mutual interest with other naturalists. Mr. Ferrell soon discovered that the young man had more than the usual amount of knowledge on the subject and realized that he would be a valuable member for the staff. Soon Horace was Assistant Curator, with a salary of \$20 a month, later increased to \$50 a month. It was found necessary, however, to employ a file clerk, whose salary was ultimately paid out of the Assistant Curator's salary and Horace found himself with a net remuneration of \$30 per month. 1900 is the year when Mr. Smith became officially affiliated with the Historical Society, whose collection then totaled 2,200 bird specimens. (The son of one of the Society's guides was the model for the Prospector in the Pioneers' statue erected at Colfax and Broadway.)

As the fame of the Society and its activities spread, it became a meeting place for naturalists of other states and even foreign countries. Here Mr. Smith met many famous naturalists whose names are familiar even now. Dr. Bergtold is one such expert who contributed much to early Colorado ornithology. He had come to Colorado for his health as a young man from Buffalo, New York, and first settled on Champa Street. With Alva Felger, a science teacher at North Denver High School, he founded the Colorado Ornithological Association, which held its meetings in Dr. Bergtold's offices, with Dr. Bergtold as president, Felger as Secretary, and Horace as treasurer. One of Mr. Felger's natural history students was Robert Rockwell, well known to Colorado naturalists for his long association with the Colorado Museum of Natural History (now the Denver Museum), and his various publications, alone or in collaboration with Museum staff members. Mr. Rockwell was instrumental in establishing the Colorado Museum of Natural History and City Park in their present location. Mr. Smith recalls that Mr. Ferrell, at that time head of the Historical Society, complained that few people would want to go halfway to Kansas to visit a museum. In reminiscing on Mr. Ferrell, Horace observed that Mr. Ferrell had been a newspaper man and had gone on news-gathering assignments with Eugene Field.

Another of Mr. Smith's acquaintances was Carl Aiken, a taxidermist who settled in Colorado Springs rather late in life and made important contributions to ornithology. Horace visited him at Colorado Springs, where Aiken was especially interested in Mr. Smith's specimen of Baird's bunting--one of the Savannah Sparrows described by Spencer F. Baird of the U. S. National Museum in Washington, D. C.

Mr. Smith also came to know a number of members of the "English Colony" at Colorado Springs who made contributions to the study of natural history. Among them was William L. Slater, whose "History of the Birds of Colorado" is one of the most important early works on the subject, and who later made outstanding contributions to the study of ornithology in South Africa. Mr. Slater was a brother-in-law of William J. Palmer, also of Colorado Springs.

Another prominent naturalist from the "English Colony" was Theodore Cockerill, who related that after a visit to the British Museum as a boy he resolved to become a naturalist. Because of ill health he migrated to America and settled in Colorado Springs. Mr. Smith became acquainted with him when Mr. Cockerill invited him to join his newly formed Colorado Biological Society. Asked for suggestions as to officers, Mr. Smith proposed Dennis Gale, of Gold Hill fame, for President. Mr. Gale proved to be a reluctant candidate but was finally persuaded to accept the office under the condition that he would never have to preside at a meeting. This condition was easily met, since the society conducted its affairs by correspondence and no regular meetings were ever held during its life, which ended prematurely when Mr. Cockerill found his health sufficiently improved to return to England. Mr. Smith was to meet Mr. Cockerill again, since he suffered a relapse and returned to Colorado to resume his career at the university of Colorado at Boulder, where he taught for many years. Mr. Smith recalls that there was sufficient resemblance in their appearance for him to be mistaken for Professor Cockerill at a meeting of the A. O. U. in Denver.

Mr. Smith became acquainted with Dennis Gale through Alfred Anthony. Mr. Gale was another Englishman who had settled first in Canada, where he engaged in the logging business. In this outdoor occupation he became interested in birds, and when he entered the mining business at Gold Hill, below Ward, Colorado, he continued in his collection of bird specimens and eggs. His egg collection was particularly valuable, and was eventually left to the University at Boulder. Mr. Gale also collected numerous mammals, which he forwarded to C. Hart Merriam, Director of the U. S. National Museum in Washington, D. C. for classification. Some of his specimens were declared to be new species, Gale's red-backed mouse and the Smooth-tailed wood rat among them.

Another member of the Colorado Biological Society was Harmon Nash, a court reporter in Pueblo, Colorado, whose particular interest was butterflies. A butterfly which Mr. Smith sent to him was pronounced by him as new to the State of Colorado, having previously been reported no farther north than Texas. Mr. Smith's specimen, which he caught at his sister's geranium bed, appeared to be well-worn, possibly on account of its unusual travels, and was pictured in "The Butterfly Book" put out by Doubleday Page.

Ernest J. Oslar was another Englishman whom Mr. Smith remembers well. Oslar was a professional collector, mostly of insects, and his patrons included the Rothschilds and a wealthy hobbyist from Turkey. Mr. Oslar was collecting butterflies in the vicinity of Colorado Springs when Mr. Smith met him, but later settled in Denver. Mr. Oslar related how he won a contest among a number of rugged young men by climbing Pike's Peak, signing the register, and on his way down encountering the nearest contestant still laboriously toiling up the cogroad bed. This feat earned for him among local Alpinists the title: "Oslar the Spider". Obviously, butterfly and beetle collecting was not only healthful and stamina-building, but profitable as well. The book, "Rocky Mountain Naturalists", comments that while Mr. Oslar did not publish any records, he must be reckoned as an outstandingly successful naturalist since he raised a family of 10 children in a profession whose only stock-in-trade was the fragile commodity of insects.

The famous ornithologist, Elliott Coues, was also known personally by Mr. Smith. Noting from an item in the newspaper that Mr. Coues was stopping in Denver, Mr. Smith called on him at his hotel, and arranged for him to visit the State Historical Society the next day. Mr. Coues was at that time writing his "History of Western Birds", and took three of Mr. Smith's specimens to Washington with him for comparison with other specimens. The specimens were of the Flammulated Screech Owl, (now Flammulated Owl), of which there were only fifteen specimens at the time; a duck, then called the Little Black Head; and Richardson's Pigeon Hawk. Mr. Coues had named a western specimen of the Flammulated Owl as the Idaho race, and wanted Mr. Smith's specimen for comparison. Unfortunately, Mr. Coues died shortly thereafter with the work uncompleted, and Mr. Smith's specimens remained in the collection at Washington.

Edward Royal Warren, whose book, "Mammals of Colorado", is an outstanding work on this subject, was a surveyor who took advantage of his outdoor occupation to collect specimens of wildlife. Mr. Smith visited Mr. Warren and his sister at their home in Colorado Springs, and remembers the many trays of mammal skins housed in the garage.

Mr. Smith also knew Fred M. Dille, a Greeley naturalist who contributed many articles to the "Oologist," and later became manager of the Niobrara Wildlife Refuge in Nebraska. A fellow resident of Greeley, General Meeker, was sent by the Government to handle the affairs of the Indians on the Western Slope in a series of events that culminated in the Meeker Massacre. Mr. Smith recalls that the hat Mrs. Meeker wore during her captivity by the Indians was long on display in the Historical Museum.

He also met Wells W. Cooke, who put out the first checklist of the birds of Colorado. Mr. Cooke was originally on the staff of the Agricultural College at Fort Collins, specializing in dairy problems, and came to Denver frequently to lecture. Later he became associated with the Biological Survey of the Department of Agriculture in Washington, and contributed articles on bird migration and other subjects to the National Geographic Magazine.

Mr. Smith remembers Henry W. Henshaw, also of the Biological Survey, as the man who discovered that the two widely differing sapsuckers which Spencer Baird believed to be different species were actually the male and female of the Williamson's Sapsucker.

In his long career, Mr. Smith also had contacts with famous personages of a bygone era who were other than naturalists. He met Colonel Chivington of the controversial Sand Creek massacre case, when he visited the Historical Society. He remembers when H. A. W. Tabor and his bride, Baby Doe, drove up in their coach to attend an encampment of the G. A. R. at about 30th and York. At a still earlier G. A. R. encampment on the Capitol grounds he saw General William Sherman, the guest of honor and principal speaker. The main event was preceded by a big parade along Grant and Sherman Streets, during which the marchers sang Civil War songs, including "Marching Through Georgia". The Capitol building was then under construction, and Horace and the other young people, unable to see over the heads of their elders, climbed upon the piles of building materials, from which he heard the General reiterate his opinion, "War is Hell".

Horace was also present at the Statehood Celebration on July 4, 1876, which took place in the woods along the Platte River on the north side of town, and he remembers the big ovation accorded the first Miss Colorado.

Although it is fascinating to hear Mr. Smith tell of his experiences with famous personages and events of the past, his personal observations in natural history are no less interesting, containing items of information seldom witnessed by naturalists in any age. He recalls that on one fishing trip his party entertained itself while eating lunch near the bank of a stream by feeding scraps to a chipmunk, and a weasel suddenly darted out from beneath the bank and carried the well-fed chipmunk away. On another occasion he watched a Golden Eagle trying to catch a jackrabbit in the vicinity of today's Stapleton Airport. But the "jack" was not defenseless-- as the eagle came down upon him in a stupendous dive, the rabbit leaped high in the air and the eagle clutched vainly at the spot previously occupied by the rabbit, but before the bird could gather himself up for another attack the rabbit had made off for safety in a neighboring fencerow. He remembers one winter in his boyhood when some redpolls took up residence in the barnyard and chose as sleeping quarters a 2x4 running horizontally on the inside of a board fence. Observing that the birds would burrow into the snow piled on top of this board, Horace and his brother slipped out one evening with a bird-cage, and, stealthily reaching over the top of the fence, Horace was able to pluck a male and two females out of their snug igloos. The birds took kindly to imprisonment, fed readily on bird seed, and did not seem to miss their freedom until spring, when the instinct for migration apparently seized them and they beat against their cage bars until Horace released them to return to their northern homeland. Horned larks also took advantage of man-made conditions in passing the winter months. They apparently found that wagon tracks in heavy snow made excellent banks into which they would tunnel for the night, although they were frequently routed out by the four-footed traffic.

Another interesting recollection that Mr. Smith has of the Denver of half a century ago is of the hunters' rendezvous on the hill where Presbyterian Hospital now stands. Here the sportsmen dug a crater above whose rim they would wave a white cloth, which attracted curious antelope, then common on the plains around Denver, within shooting range.

A chat with Dad Smith today at his home at 1457 St. Paul Street rewards the visitor with an experience which can seldom be duplicated in today's atmosphere of haste and tension. In sharing his recollections with us, he brings us all the romance and nostalgia of the past, coupled with observations that throw some insight into the behavior of animals in any era, and serve to remind us again of the timelessness and changelessness of Nature.

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WELDONA NOTES
by Howard Rollin

February 17, 1959 -- Bird life has continued to be at a standstill during the past month, because of the prolonged cold weather. Only in the last few days has there been any activity, and that is limited to only one or two species. The hawks remain very scarce, including the Golden Eagle. The Sparrow Hawk has been an exception and is seen frequently, unusual here. A Prairie Falcon was seen Feb. 7, the second or third this winter. The Horned Owl is here in its usual numbers. One Ring-necked Pheasant was seen south of here, Jan. 23. The Magpie is numerous as usual; one was seen trying to capture a Horned Lark, and without interruption it no doubt would have succeeded. The Horned Lark began singing more frequently Feb. 12-14; large flocks have been heading north in the last week and with these are varied numbers of the Lapland Longspur. Some small flocks of longspurs only have been noted, also. The Northern Shrike has been of irregular and rare occurrence this winter. One Western Meadowlark was present all fall and winter, later joined by another; 3 1/31, 4 2/4 to the present. One Red-winged Blackbird was seen 2/14, the first for the year. The only junco still here is the White-winged. The Tree Sparrow is numerous and began singing 2/3, more frequently 2/11 and quite commonly at this date.

March 16, 1959 -- Inclement weather has continued to inhibit bird movement here during the past month, and very few migrants have arrived. The most abundant species is the Horned Lark, with the Tree Sparrow a close second. The Lapland Longspur is working northward still at this time, mostly in small flocks or mixed with the Horned Lark. The latter are going north in large flocks for the past two or three weeks. Hawks are very scarce, the commonest being still the Sparrow Hawk, which is most unusual, as that bird is generally very rare.

The following bring observations up to date:

Canada Goose - 35 3/7; rare here at any time, especially in the winter. (No other waterfowl have been seen.)
Rough-legged Hawk - 1 2/22, 3/13; scarce this winter.
Golden Eagle and Marsh Hawk - occasional, but less frequently than usual.
Prairie Falcon - 1 2/22, 3/11; rare.
Sparrow Hawk - fairly common.
Ring-necked Pheasant - spreading out in suitable habitat; 4 3/7 the most seen here.
Killdeer - first, 1 3/13.
Great Horned Owl - common, nesting at this time.
Horned Lark - first flight song 3/1; increasing every day.
Common Crow - 1 2/16; one or two pass occasionally, presumably the same ones.
Blue Jay - common at Fort Morgan.
Robin - first, 1 2/28, 3/16.
Northern Shrike - present; very few.
Starling - none.
House Sparrow - a few come and go.
Western Meadowlark - increasing and beginning to sing.
Redwinged Blackbird - first 2 2/20; 1 3/1.
Gray-crowned Rosy Finch (Hepburn's) - 1 3/14, an unusual time for it; previous years' records were in fall or early winter.
American Goldfinch - 1 2/23; very rare.
Oregon Junco - first 1 3/10; increasing.
Tree Sparrow - still common; singing freely.
Lapland Longspur - going north in fair numbers, 2/24; about in small numbers to present.

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BIRDS OF THE MONTH

by Donald M. Thatcher

March 20, 1959 -- There is little of unusual interest to report this month, except that the generally dull birding of the winter has continued. Mostly the reports received seem to reflect more activity by observers than by the birds.

The most notable exception is the Bohemian Waxwing, which is still numerous in this region. In Denver, the large flocks seem to have broken up into smaller groups, usually of one to four dozen, several of which might be seen in one day throughout the city. They now appear to feed largely on the elm scale insect, and there are reports of several birds having been found dead in the vicinity of elms which had been sprayed. On warm days the waxwings have been noted catching flying insects above the tree-tops. More than the usual numbers of the Cedar Waxwing have been reported, some of these in company with the larger Bohemian.

A later report from Mrs. Estella McCutcheon indicates that the puzzling woodpecker reported last month as seen by her at Fort Morgan is a female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (the eastern race), with red cap and white throat.

The usual early spring migrants have been about on schedule, as listed below. Also listed are some unusual occurrences. Contributors: Mrs. Inez Baker, Dennis Carter, Mrs. Alene Catlett, Catherine Crone, Mrs. Mary Crow, Mrs. Marjorie Lett, Donald Thatcher and Longmont Bird Club.

Great Blue Heron - 10 3/18 Boulder County (CC); more than the usual number of wintering singles reported.
 Cinnamon Teal - 2 3/18 Boulder (CC)
 Blue-winged Teal - 2 2/12 Platteville (ML); 1 3/18 Boulder (CC)
 Red-tailed Hawk - 5 in one group, 3/11 Boulder (CC)
 Baird's Sandpiper - first, 11 3/14 Barr Lake (Club); (3/30/58, 3/17/57, 4/14/56, 3/27/55)
 GLAUCOUS GULL - 1 seen several times, Feb. and 3/1, "always alone, very large and pure white", Platteville (ML)
 California Gull - 15 3/11 Boulder (CC)
 Mourning Dove - 55 2/6 Longmont (LBC); first song 3/17 Denver (DT) (3/21/58, 3/16/57, 3/23/56)
 Roadrunner - one at Colorado Springs most of winter (AC)
 Blue Jay - 4 at feeder through Jan.-Feb. Platteville (ML); 2 2/15, 1 3/1 Boulder (CC)
 Robin - first song 3/19 Denver (DT); no sizeable flocks yet reported.
 Mountain Bluebird - first, 1 2/13 Longmont (LBC), 1 2/15 Morrison (DC) (2/28/58, 2/3/56 & 57); several small groups 2/22 and later; 100 (4 flocks) 3/11, 718 3/18 Boulder (CC).
 Water Pipit - 4 3/1 Boulder (CC).
 Myrtle Warbler - one reported last month still present 3/6, Longmont (IB)
 Audubon's Warbler - 1 3/8 Boulder (CC)
 YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD - 1 3/14 Barr Lake (Club)
 Redwinged Blackbird - first females, 200 2/14 Platteville (ML)
 Brewer's Blackbird - 25 2/13 Plattev. (ML); 25 3/14 Barr L. (club); also a few reports of 1 to 5.
 Common Redpoll - 16 2/15 Estes Park (IB)
 Harris' Sparrow - 4 3/1 Boulder (CC)
 White-crowned Sparrow - migrating, 3/2 Plattev. (ML), 3/8 Denver (MC).

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FOR RENT (BIRD LOVERS PREFERRED) - Small 5-room house, one floor, suitable for two people, at 1904 South Marion. Wall-to-wall carpeting front room, otherwise unfurnished. No garage. \$55 a month plus utilities to right parties who will help take care of yard and make the birds happy. NO CATS OR DOGS! See Catherine A. Hurlbutt, 1910 South Marion, SPruce 7-9362.

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REGULAR MEETING, March 24, 8 pm, At Bird Room, Denver Museum of Natural History. (Use north, employees' entrance) Dr. O. A. Knorr of the Biology Dept., University of Colorado, will talk on bird banding. Also identification session, with skins.

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SPECIAL FIELD TRIP, Sunday, March 29. Meet at Red Rocks Museum after Easter Sunrise Service. Bring brunch. Leader, Phyllis McRae, who will have a camp stove. Foothills and lakes.

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See next page for schedule of regular field trips. It is planned to maintain this schedule throughout the year, repeating each trip once a month, with occasional special trips. Suggested charge for those riding with others is 4 cents per mile, plus any tolls, divided by the number of riders, including the driver.

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A field trip to Laramie, Wyoming, to see courting SAGE GROUSE is contemplated, probably for the weekend of April 18-19. Anyone interested should call or write Thompson Marsh, 199 Ash St., Denver 20 (FR7-5380) or Donald Thatcher, 2916 Perry St., Denver 12 (GL5-7479) to receive notice of final plans.

REGULAR FIELD TRIPS FOR APRIL

1st Sat. Leave Broadway and Alameda at 7:30 for Waterton and the
4 South Platte. $\frac{1}{2}$ day, five mile walk. Ferd Kleinschnitz,
leader.

1st Sun. Leave Colfax and Sheridan at 7:30 for Red Rocks and
5 Genessee Mountain. $\frac{1}{2}$ day, three mile walk. Don Thatcher,
leader.

2nd Sat. Leave Denver Museum of Natural History at 7:00 for Barr
11 Lake. Take lunch, two mile walk. Lois Webster, leader.

2nd Sun. Leave Cherry Creek Shopping Center at First and University,
12 at 9:00 for Franktown. Take lunch. Parnell and Jean White,
leaders.

3rd Sat. Leave Colfax and Sheridan at 10:00 for lower Bear Creek.
18 Take lunch. Sadie Morrison, leader.

3rd Sun. Leave Broadway and Alameda at 7:00 for Turkey Creek and
19 Deer Creek. $\frac{1}{2}$ day. John Chapin, leader.

4th Sat. Leave Cherry Creek Shopping Center, at First and University,
25 at 7:30 for the prairie. Take lunch, four mile walk.
John Flavin, leader.

4th Sun. Leave 4845 Redwood Drive, Bow Mar, Littleton, at 9:00
26 for Bowles, Marston, and Henry Lakes. $\frac{1}{2}$ day. Edwin McKee,
leader.

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